



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 3, 2004

For Information Contact Public Affairs
HARRIET BERNICK
Telephone: (602) 514-7736
Pager: (602) 356-0004

TWO FELONS PLEAD GUILTY TO CONSPIRACY TO UNLAWFULLY ACQUIRE OVER 100 FIREARMS FROM FEDERALLY LICENSED FIREARMS DEALERS

PHOENIX, ARIZONA - Paul K. Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, and Virginia O'Brien, Special Agent in Charge for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, announced that on February 2, 2004, FRANCISCO JOHNNY RAMIREZ, D.O.B. 3/9/77, of Mesa, Arizona, and JOSE ROBERTO GONZALEZ, D.O.B. 7/3/67, of Maywood, California, pled guilty to the following felony offenses : Conspiracy; False Statements in Connection with the Acquisition of Firearms, Felon in Possession of Firearms, and Possession of Marijuana (Ramirez only) before District Judge David G. Campbell in Phoenix, Arizona.

In the course of their guilty pleas, Francisco Johnny Ramirez and Jose Roberto Gonzalez admitted the following facts. Beginning on June 8, 2002, and continuing through April 12, 2003, Ramirez and Gonzalez, along with a third person (the Straw Purchaser), conspired to make false statements in connection with the acquisition of firearms from federally licensed firearms dealers. On June 8, 2002, Ramirez asked the Straw Purchaser to purchase firearms and told him he would be paid for his services. On June 8, 2002, the Straw Purchaser went to Jewel Box, Inc., 601 North Central, Phoenix, Arizona, 85004, a federally licensed firearms dealer, and purchased 5 firearms for Gonzalez and Ramirez. When purchasing the firearms, the

(MORE)

Straw Purchaser represented to the dealer that he was the purchaser of the firearms when, in fact, Gonzalez and Ramirez were the actual purchasers.

On September 7, 2002, the Straw Purchaser returned to Jewel Box, Inc., and unlawfully purchased 6 handguns on behalf of Gonzalez and Ramirez. On September 7, 2002, the Straw Purchaser went to Windy City Pawn Brokers, 302 West Indian School, Phoenix, Arizona, 85013, a different federally licensed firearms dealer, and unlawfully purchased 15 firearms on behalf of Gonzalez and Ramirez.

On November 23, 2002, the Straw Purchaser returned to Windy City Pawn Brokers and unlawfully purchased 52 semi-automatic firearms on behalf of Gonzalez and Ramirez. On April 12, 2003, Gonzalez and Ramirez furnished the Straw Purchaser over \$5,000 in United States currency. The two then instructed the Straw Purchaser to return to Windy City Pawn Brokers and unlawfully purchase 35 firearms on their behalf.

Gonzalez admitted that on November 23, 2002, he knowingly possessed 52 semi-automatic handguns while having been previously convicted of Possession of a Controlled Substance, Phencyclidine, a felony, in the Superior Court of California, Los Angeles County, on October 17, 1988. Ramirez admitted that on November 23, 2002, he knowingly possessed 52 semi-automatic handguns while having been previously convicted of Conspiracy to Unlawfully Transport Marijuana for Sale, in the Superior Court of Arizona, Pima County, on May 1, 2000. Ramirez also admitted that knowingly possessed 3 semi-automatic handguns and knowingly possessed with intent to distribute approximately 1.36 kilograms of marijuana on April 12, 2003.

This prosecution is another success for the District of Arizona's Project Safe Neighborhood's firearms enforcement program. One of the key priorities of Project Safe Neighborhoods is the apprehension and prosecution of individuals who illegally acquire large quantities of firearms from licensed dealers.

Convictions for Conspiracy in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371; False Statements in Connection with the Acquisition of Firearms in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 924(a)(1)(A); and Possession of Marijuana with Intent to Distribute (1.36 kilograms) in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1), each carry maximum penalties of five

(MORE)

years in prison, a \$250,000.00 fine or both. A conviction for Felon in Possession of a Firearm in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1) carries a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, a \$250,000.00 fine or both.

Sentencing for Ramirez and Gonzalez is set before Judge Campbell on Monday, April 19, 2004, at 2:00 p.m.

The investigation was conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives with assistance from the Mesa Police Department.

CASE NUMBER: CR-03-406-PHX-DGC
RELEASE NUMBER: 2004-022

#